

California M E D I C I N E

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450 SUTTER, SAN FRANCISCO 8 PHONE DOUGLAS 2-0062

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EDITORIAL

Medical Care on the March

This month the California Medical Association embarks on a program of medical public relations which is unique and which has already drawn nationwide attention.

The program is a composite result of several studies, including the report of physician-patient relationships by Ernest Dichter, Ph.D., the recommendations of the Advisory Planning Committee, the report of the Association's Committee on Medical Economics and numerous suggestions from county society offices which operate actively in the business administration in physicians' offices.

In its initial stages, this campaign will call for the dissemination of suggestions aimed at creating for the public two basic guarantees. First is the guarantee of the availability of medical care under any and all circumstances. This will include medical care at any time of the day or night, on any day of the year, and without regard to the ability of the patient to pay. Briefly summarized, it means "Medical care for all, regardless. . . ."

This guarantee may sound like a big order but on analysis it comes down to little more than the organization of medical resources in the interest of the patient. At present the physicians in organized medicine in any community are actually delivering service on this basis to all the people of the community even though not by formally established procedure. When they can organize their own resources on an orderly basis, they can make a guarantee to the public that any person can receive medical care, regardless of circumstances.

The second guarantee to the public will be one of protection against possible abuses by physicians who are members of the American Medical Association. This will include protection against acts of malpractice, against unnecessary or incompetent procedure, against overcharges for service and against unethical acts by member physicians. Such

protection is already given the public by the vast majority of physicians; the organized effort will be to protect the public from such acts by the few in the profession who may abuse their professional privileges.

Here, in a nutshell, is the program the C.M.A. is entering into. Its objectives are to prove to the public that the practice of medicine, so far as it is within the purview of the Association, is, in deed as well as in word, a service performed for the benefit of the public — to prove that member physicians honor the terms of the opening statement of the Principles of Medical Ethics, that "reward or financial gain is a subordinate consideration."

If the public is guaranteed the availability of high quality medical care under all circumstances, and if the public is guaranteed protection against ill-advised acts on the part of a few physicians, the public will take to its heart the reputable practitioners who make the guarantee and will reject any politically-inspired idea of dictatorial governmental medicine.

To implement this program and to assist all county medical societies in putting it into effect, the C.M.A. has employed two field representatives and has named its present field secretary as director of public relations. This constitutes a team of experienced men who can assist county societies and their members in earning the respect and admiration of their patients and of the residents in their communities, by performing in the highest traditions of the profession.

As time goes on, other facets of the proposed program will be put into effect, as authorized by the governing bodies of the C.M.A. Meanwhile, the start which is now being made will carry to the people of the state the message that medicine means business and means its services to be performed for the good of the people. The effect of this program, both on the profession and the public, is bound to be salutary.

*Phrase coined by the Alameda-Contra Costa Medical Association.